

AN IVORY OF THE Xth CENTURY

THIS ivory, which was acquired in 1938 by the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, was bought in the Paris market. We know nothing of its previous history save that it is said to have been for many years in the possession of a family in the French provinces. It figured in the Arts of the Middle Ages Loan Exhibition in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Feb. 17 to March 24, 1940, and is reproduced in the Catalogue, No. 119, pl. 1.

The carving (pl. 1) represents the Virgin, standing and holding the Child, with St. John Baptist on her right and St. John Chrysostom on her left. These figures have been cut out of the panel of which they originally formed the relief;¹ of this panel the base on which they stand formed part. The carving measures 16.3 cm. from the top of the Virgin's head to the lower edge of the base, which is 10.5 cm. wide. The border adorned by an astragalus is 0.8 cm. thick and is not cut in the same piece as the panel, the thickness of which is 0.9 cm. The figures are almost exactly on the same scale as those of the celebrated coronation ivory in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris (pl. 8): the Virgin, here, being as tall as the Christ in the coronation ivory, and the two saints as tall as the imperial couple. As is shown by the photograph of the reverse of our ivory (pl. 2), the figures were clumsily chopped out of the original panel, but care was taken not to damage the relief. At present, the figure of St. John Chrysostom is broken off, both at the base and at the saint's right hand, this fragment being held together with the rest of the carving by a bronze bar at the back.

The ivory is of an even, creamy tone, "old ivory" indeed, on the carved side; it shows brown stains on the back. The surface is in excellent condition, only slightly rubbed; the cutting is sharp throughout.

We know several pieces of ivory sculpture of this period, cut out like this one from the panels which originally bore them, but this is the only one consisting of three figures. Among the others, a carving of the Virgin (pls. 3, 4) in the Metropolitan Museum (Morgan Collection) is the ivory known to us that most closely resembles ours. Then, there is one in the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe*, at Hamburg (pl. 5), yet another Virgin in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Goldschmidt und Weitzmann, II, 51) and a St. John Baptist in the Liverpool Museum (our pl. 6; Goldschmidt und Weitz-

¹ Our photograph shows it mounted on a wooden backing which has been cut in the shape of the central panel of a triptych (cf. pl. 6).

mann, II, 52). The last named, though excised, like the others just mentioned, from its original panel, has been fitted into a modern ivory backing. The panels bearing all these carvings had probably been damaged, the figures being cut out afterwards in order that they might not look broken. An intact panel, also allied to ours, is preserved in the Archiepiscopal Museum at Utrecht (pl. 7): originally the central panel of a triptych, as ours doubtless was.

We cannot point to another work with exactly the same subject as ours. An analogous composition, executed in a different style, may be found in a triptych in the Moscow Museum (Goldschmidt und Weitzmann, II, 73 b), with the Virgin and Child on the central panel, St. Nicholas on the wing to the Virgin's right and St. John Chrysostom on that to her left. Another similar composition exists in a little gilt bronze triptych in the Victoria and Albert Museum, with the Virgin on the centre panel, St. Gregory the Theologian on the wing to her right and St. John Chrysostom on the other (Peirce and Tyler, *Byzantine Art*, Benn, 1926, pl. 72).

The carvings reproduced on our plates 4 and 5 may well have formed part of compositions similar to, or even identical with ours. The Liverpool St. John Baptist (pl. 6), on the other hand, must have belonged to a composition, often reproduced at the time, at the centre of which stood Our Lord, for St. John Baptist holds a scroll with the inscription: *ἴδε οἱ ἀγνὸς τὸν θεοῦ οἱ αἴρον [αἴρων] τὴν ἀμαρτίαν τὸν κόσμον* ("Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world").

In style, as we have said, the Dumbarton Oaks ivory is nearest to that in the Metropolitan Museum (our plate 4). But the two are not identical. The chief characteristics of this style: unobtrusive grace, a reconciliation of the extremes of elegance and of austerity, come out more fully in the Dumbarton Oaks ivory, the author of which had a way of his own of giving suppleness to drapery by introducing shallow folds between the deep ones. The presence of the three figures greatly adds to its interest; observe how regularity in the vertical folds, perhaps a little arbitrary in the robes of the Virgin and of St. John Chrysostom, gives place to a slightly suppler system in St. John Baptist's raiment, producing the impression of a different kind of cloth. The Precursor's cloak, with its modish cut and finish, reminds one rather of a *sortie-de-bal* than of the camel's hair garment mentioned in the Gospel.

We would not venture to assert that the hand that carved the Dumbarton Oaks ivory is to be seen in any of the others mentioned above. It seems just possible that the Morgan panel may be the work, executed at a different stage in his artistic development, of the same artist. But we know

nothing else that we can associate with him. One may play with the idea that the coronation panel, in the Cabinet des Médailles (pl. 8), bears the signature of the man who wrought the diptych of which one leaf is at Dresden, the other at Hanover (pl. 9, 11). But we would be at a loss to suggest where to look for other work by the master of the Utrecht panel (pl. 7), or the diptych in Milan cathedral (pl. 10), or the Christ formerly in the Trivulzio now in the Robert von Hirsch collection (pl. 12), or the ex-Stroganoff-ex-Gualino Christ (pl. 13) or the Casanatense-Palazzo Venezia triptych (pls. 14, 15).

We do not know the name of a single Byzantine ivory sculptor. But each one of the masterpieces above-mentioned bears the mark of a distinct personality: distinct, although all these men were no doubt contemporaries, and probably influenced one another. One may recall more recent periods in the history of art; for instance the beginning of the sixteenth century at Venice, when Giorgione, the youthful Titian and Palma Vecchio were painting. There are pictures the attribution of which to one or another of these masters is a matter of controversy, even today, with all the mass of material at our disposal to help settle it.

Among the ivory-carvings of the first rank mentioned above, two bear inscriptions naming Byzantine sovereigns. The inscription on the Palazzo Venezia triptych mentions a Constantine who is probably none other than the VIIth, known as Porphyrogennetos. His reign was a long one; it lasted from 913 to 959. The coronation panel in the Cabinet des Médailles bears the names of a Romanus and an Eudoxia. Until 1926, it was assumed that these were Romanus IV and the Eudoxia whom he married in 1068. The dating of Byzantine ivories of the great period lay in confusion as long as it was assumed that two masterpieces so closely related in style as the Palazzo Venezia triptych and the Cabinet des Médailles coronation panel could be a century to a century and a half apart in date. In a small book which we published in 1926, and in a paper read at the Congress of Byzantine Studies held at Belgrade in 1927, we identified the Cabinet des Médailles panel, not with Romanus IV but with Romanus II, who married an Eudoxia in 942 or 943, and was crowned in 945. Our reasons for this identification² have been accepted by several writers, including Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, the authors of the chief work on Byzantine ivories. We will therefore not repeat them here.

² See H. Peirce and R. Tyler: *Byzantine Art* (Benn, London, 1926), and our paper read at the 1927 Byzantine Congress, published in *Aréthuse*, No. 16, July 1927. For a criticism of our dating, see an article by A. S. Keck and C. R. Morey on Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, Vol. II, in the *Art Bulletin*, XVII (Sept. 1935), pp. 397-406.

The stylistic relationship connecting the carvings mentioned above suffices to place them all in or very near the reign of Constantine VII. However, several groups are discernible among them, and it is not easy to say exactly how these groups stand with regard one to the other. For instance, admitting that the crucial date is given by the Cabinet des Médailles coronation panel, 942 or 945: is one to assign an earlier or a later date to the group of which the most distinguished members are the Dumbarton Oaks ivory, the Morgan Virgin, the Hamburg Virgin and the Liverpool St. John Baptist? Throughout this group, the drapery system shows a predilection for straight lines, cut with an almost ruler-like precision, occasionally bordering on mannerism. This slight eccentricity may well have been indulged in after the perfect balance achieved by the author of the Cabinet des Médailles panel. We cannot imagine the Dumbarton Oaks group as earlier than the Romanus and Eudoxia carving. But it is certainly not much later.

Apart from the ivories with which we have dealt above, there is one, and a notable one: the Cortona reliquary (pl. 16), bearing an inscription not visible on our plate referring to a Nicephorus who must be Nicephorus II Phocas (963–969). This reliquary presents a peculiar style, which is further illustrated by a panel in the Cluny Museum, Paris (pl. 17), of inferior quality but dated, carved to commemorate the marriage (972 or 973) of Otto II and Theophano, a daughter of Romanus II. The style of these two ivories differs widely from that of which the Cabinet des Médailles panel is the type. In the course of the quarter of a century which separates the Cabinet des Médailles panel from the Cortona reliquary, the ivory sculptor's vision had changed. Now, as we have just remarked, the Dumbarton Oaks ivory bears every sign of being later than the Cabinet des Médailles panel. However, it is related in style to that masterpiece. The Cortona reliquary marks a new departure, and must, in its turn, be placed later than the Dumbarton Oaks carving. As the Cortona reliquary belongs to the reign of Nicephorus II Phocas (963–969), we would suggest, for the Dumbarton Oaks ivory, a date intermediary between the Cabinet des Médailles panel and the Cortona reliquary, but, ideally, rather nearer the Cabinet des Médailles panel, i.e. about or soon after 950. An artist formed in a given school may of course have gone on working in the style he had grown up in, at a time when a younger school had supplanted his own. Bouguereau still painted Bouguereaus long after the emergence of Impressionism.

As we said in the above-mentioned *Byzantine Art*, the peculiar facial type given to Constantine VII on certain of his coins (pl. 18 B),

and on a damaged ivory at Moscow, representing the coronation of that Emperor by Our Lord (pl. 18 A), is the mark of a style with which we propose to associate the name of Constantine VII. The eyes and nose, characteristic of this style, may be found in the beardless Basileus of the Cabinet des Médailles panel (pl. 19 A). The two male saints in the Dumbarton Oaks ivory show these features in a pronounced form, and also beards resembling that of Constantine VII. The way artists of the time had of making celestial personages look like the Augustus no doubt sprang from a desire to flatter the Augustus, who, in this particular case, was himself an artist. Many ivory carvings, all of them attributable to the period in question, reproduce this physiognomy. The hair and beards of the Dumbarton Oaks ivory may be found on saints of the Palazzo Venezia triptych: the Dumbarton Oaks St. John Chrysostom, in this respect, closely resembles the Palazzo Venezia St. Jacob (pl. 14), whose body, however, like all those shown on that triptych is less elongated. The proportions of the Dumbarton Oaks saints, long and slender, together with an analogous but not identical system of drapery, and beard and eyes like the Dumbarton Oaks St. John Chrysostom, occur in two panels representing St. Paul, one in the Venice Museum (pl. 20), the other in the Vienna Museum.

The eyes and nose of the Dumbarton Oaks St. John Baptist are like those of his vis-à-vis, St. John Chrysostom. Also the beard. The hair, however, is treated differently in the two. St. John Chrysostom's hair, in the Dumbarton Oaks ivory, resembles that of certain saints in the Palazzo Venezia triptych. In order to find hair treated in the rather peculiar manner of the Dumbarton Oaks St. John Baptist, we must turn to a casket in the Museum of Rheims (pl. 22), in which Adam and Eve both wear their hair done in this manner. Observe, also, that the figures of the Rheims casket have eyes rendered just as the sculptor of the Dumbarton Oaks ivory rendered them. The Dumbarton Oaks St. John Baptist recalls the same saint on the Harbaville triptych in the Louvre (pl. 21) where drapery, hands and feet are concerned, but not so much in the face.

The tasselled fringes of the Virgin's mantle, in the Dumbarton Oaks ivory, occur in the Palazzo Venezia triptych (pl. 14) in the Hamburg Virgin (pl. 5) and in many other representations of the period. They probably figured on the Morgan ivory (pl. 4), but disappeared when this effigy of the Virgin was cut out of the panel that originally bore it. The bare feet of the Dumbarton Oaks St. John Baptist are like those of the same saint in the Palazzo Venezia triptych.

St. John Chrysostom, here as elsewhere, wears a bishop's vestments: a pallium, a pænula (or chasuble) partly covering the alb, and shoes. His

hands are indicated, under the drapery, as are those of St. Nicholas in the Palazzo Venezia triptych. St. John Chrysostom's book appears frequently in the art of the time, e.g. that held, in the Palazzo Venezia ivory, by Our Lord.

The astragalus adorning the border and the *suppedaneum*, or footstool, in the Dumbarton Oaks ivory, is a very common motif at the time of which we write: see the panel with Our Lord standing, formerly in the Gualino and before that in the Stroganoff Collections (pl. 13), the Liverpool St. John Baptist (pl. 6), and a seated Christ in a panel belonging to the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (Goldschmidt und Weitzmann, II, 55).

Countless representations of the Virgin, in other media, occur in the art of the period, and some of them are near in style to the Dumbarton Oaks panel. But there is such a wealth of ivory carving, and such good evidence for dating important pieces related to ours, that it seems unnecessary to look elsewhere for further confirmation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

As far as we know, the ivory-carving here published has only been published in the Boston Exhibition Catalogue above mentioned. For monuments related to it in style, see:

A. Goldschmidt und K. Weitzmann, *Byzantinische Elfenbeinskulpturen*, II. Berlin, Cäsierer, 1934.

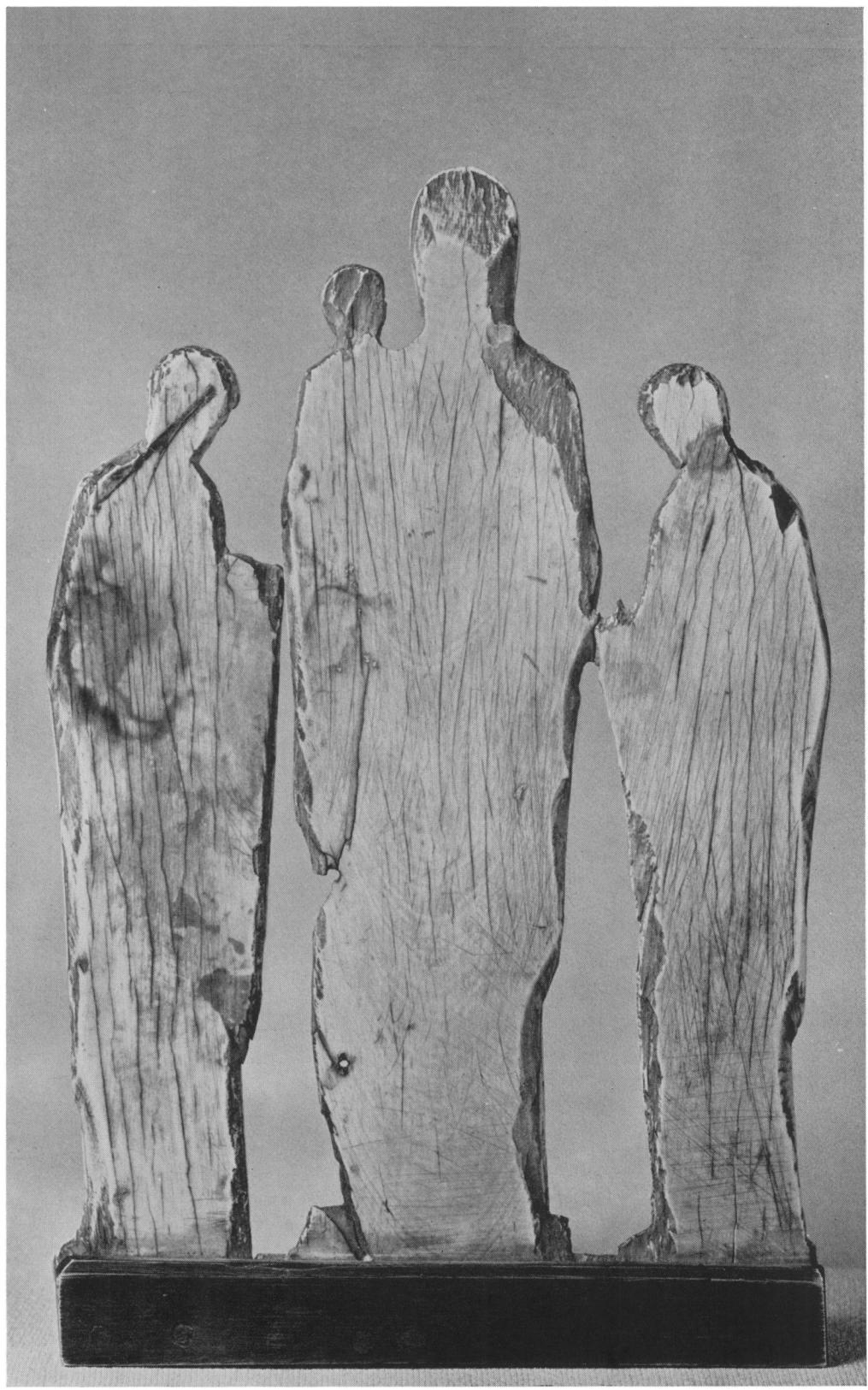
W. W. Wroth, Catalogue of Imperial Byzantine coins in the British Museum.

H. Peirce and R. Tyler, *Byzantine Art*, Benn, London, 1926.

H. Peirce and R. Tyler, Deux mouvements dans l'Art Byzantin du X^e Siècle, in *Aréthuse*, N°. 16, Juillet, 1927.



1. DUMBARTON OAKS IVORY, OBVERSE



2. DUMBARTON OAKS IVORY, REVERSE



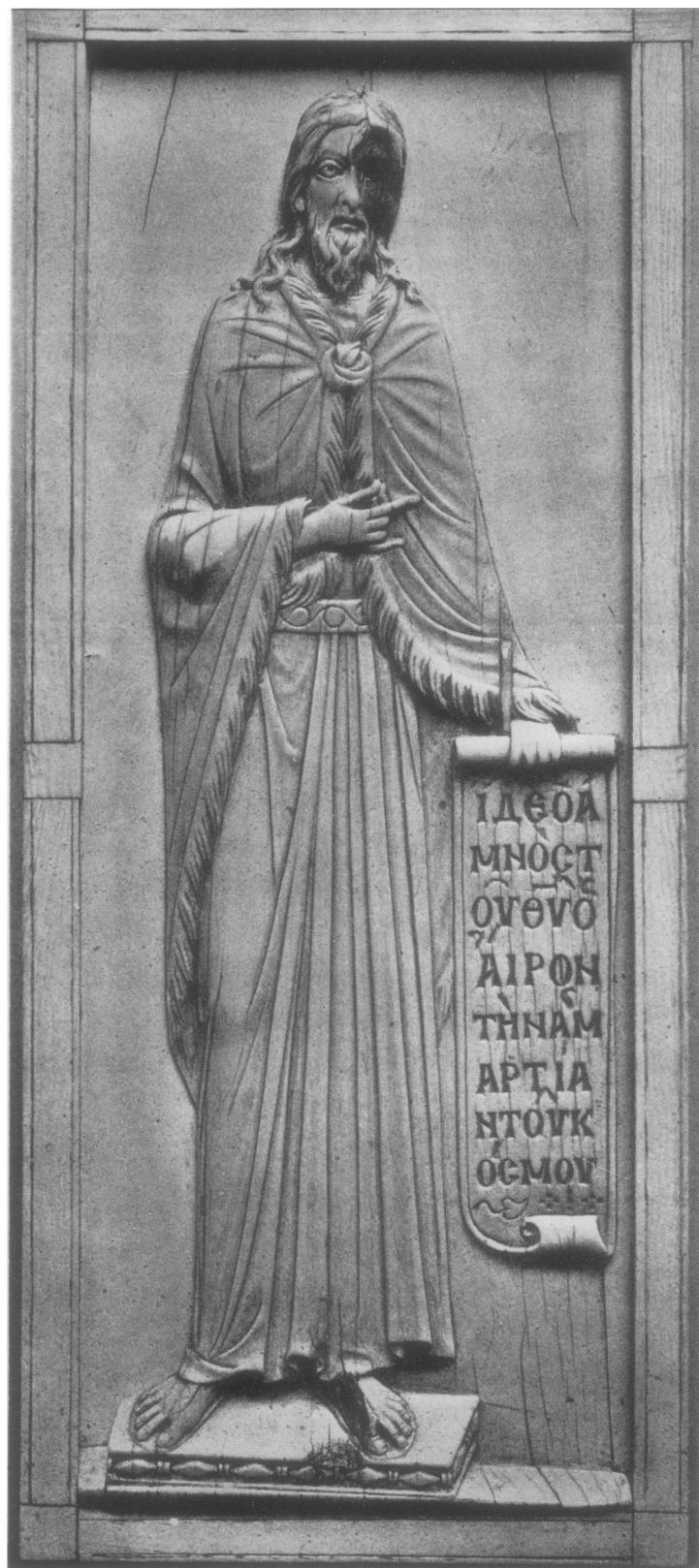
3. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM (MORGAN COLL.), VIRGIN, REVERSE



4. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM (MORGAN COLL.), VIRGIN, OBVERSE



5. HAMBURG, MUSEUM FÜR KUNST UND GEWERBE, VIRGIN



6. LIVERPOOL, FREE PUBLIC MUSEUM, ST. JOHN BAPTIST



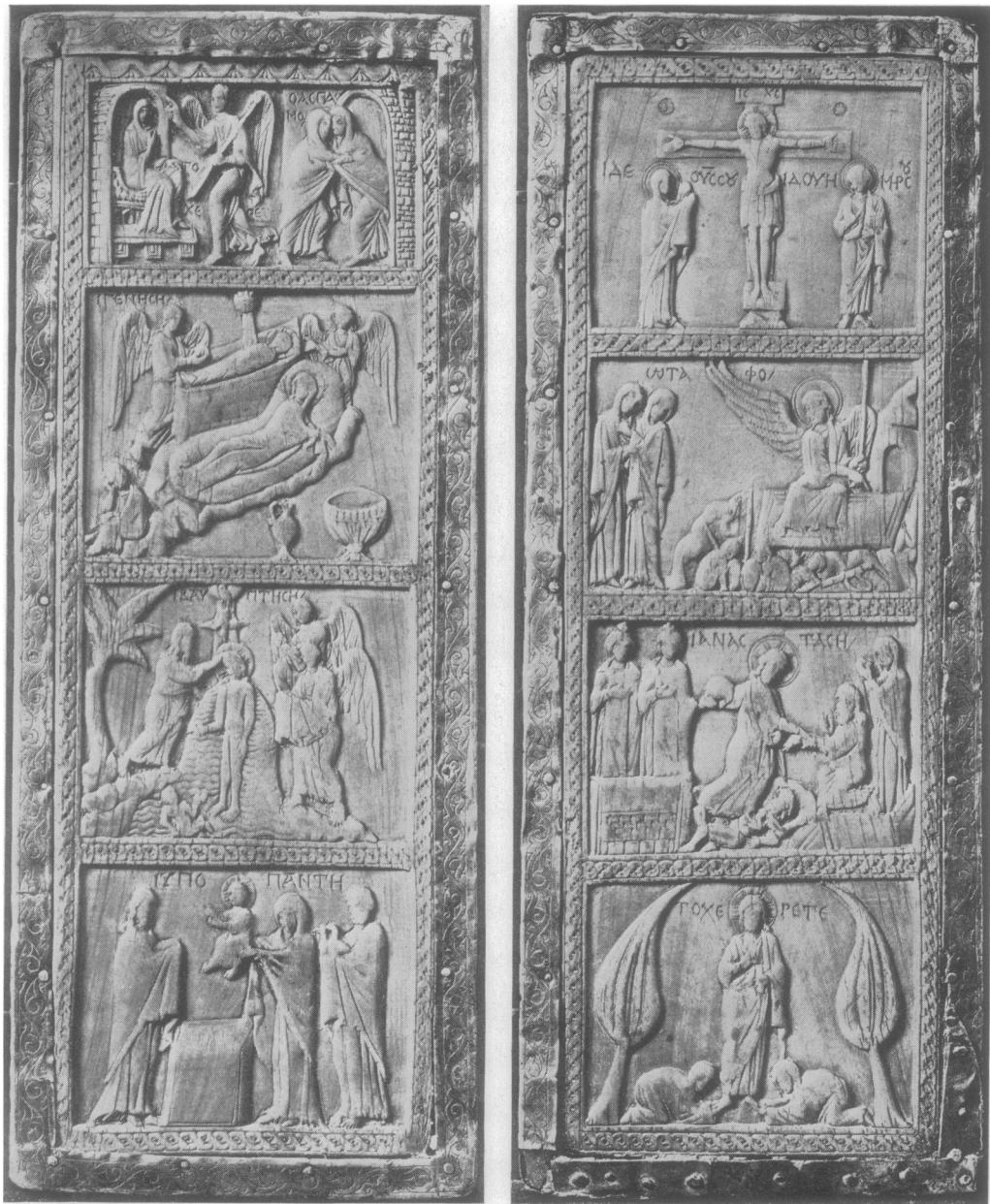
7. UTRECHT, ARCHIEPISCOPAL MUSEUM, VIRGIN



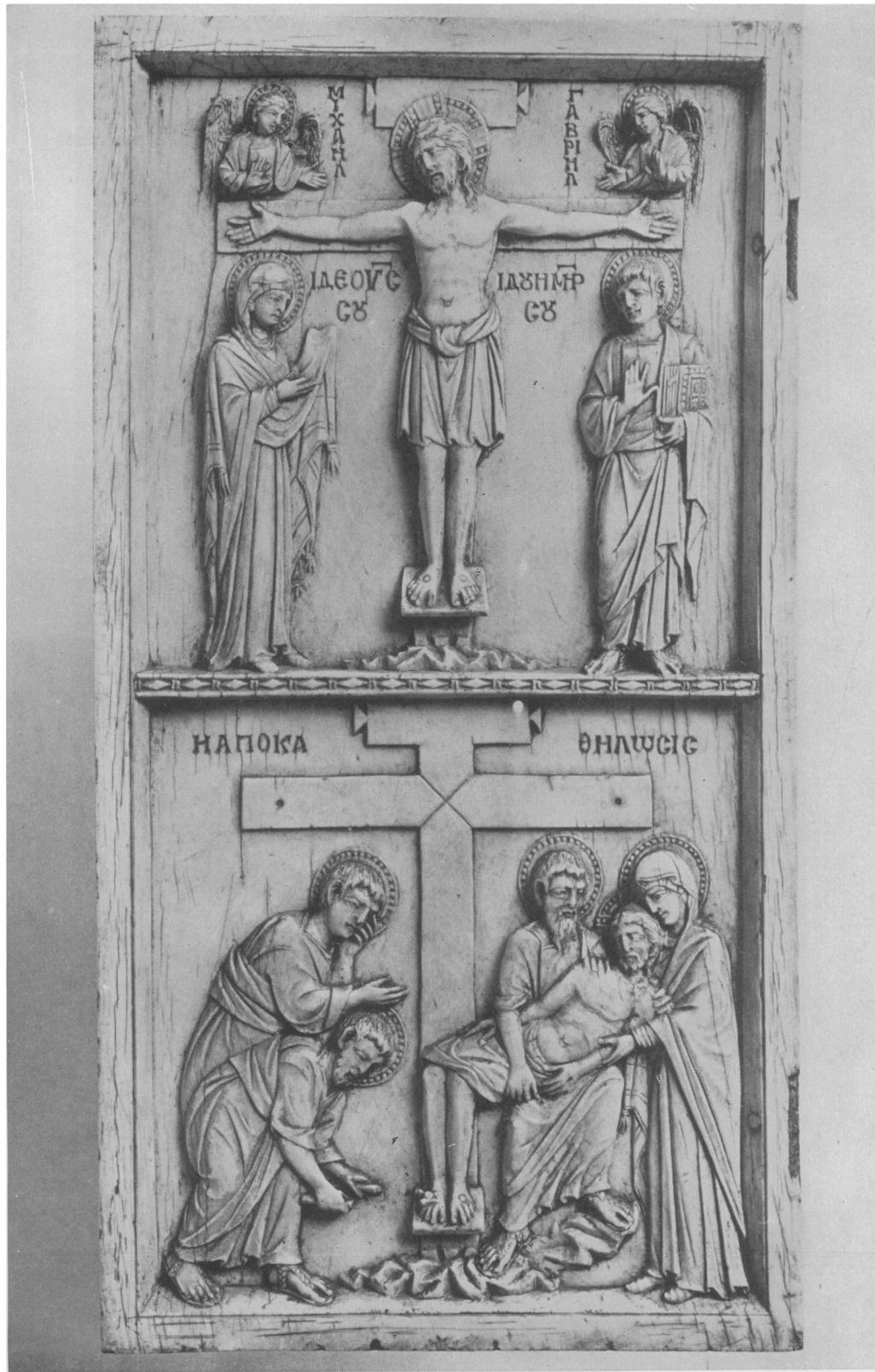
8. CABINET DES MÉDAILLES, PARIS, CORONATION PANEL



9. DRESDEN, GRÜNES GEWÖLBE, DIPTYCH LEAF



10. MILAN CATHEDRAL, DIPTYCH

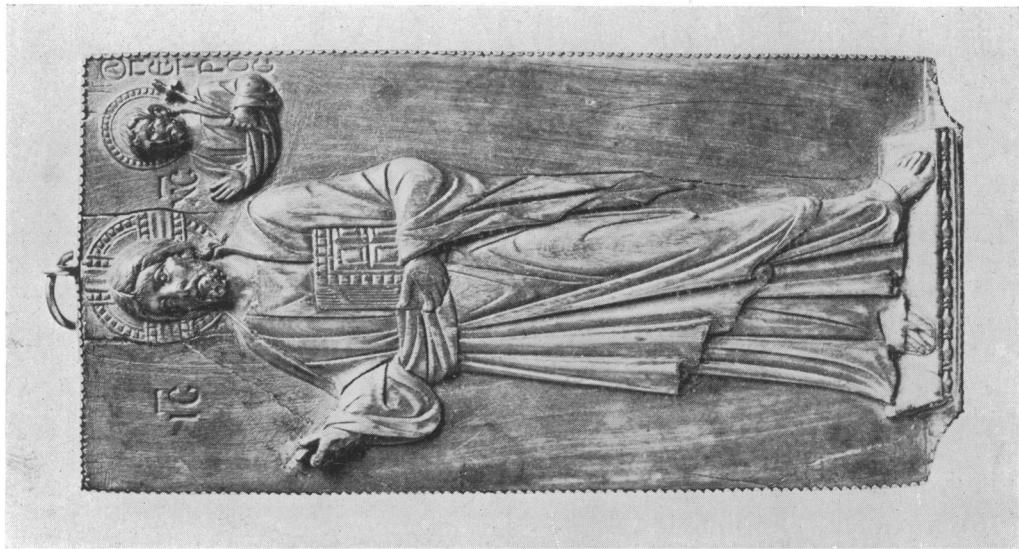
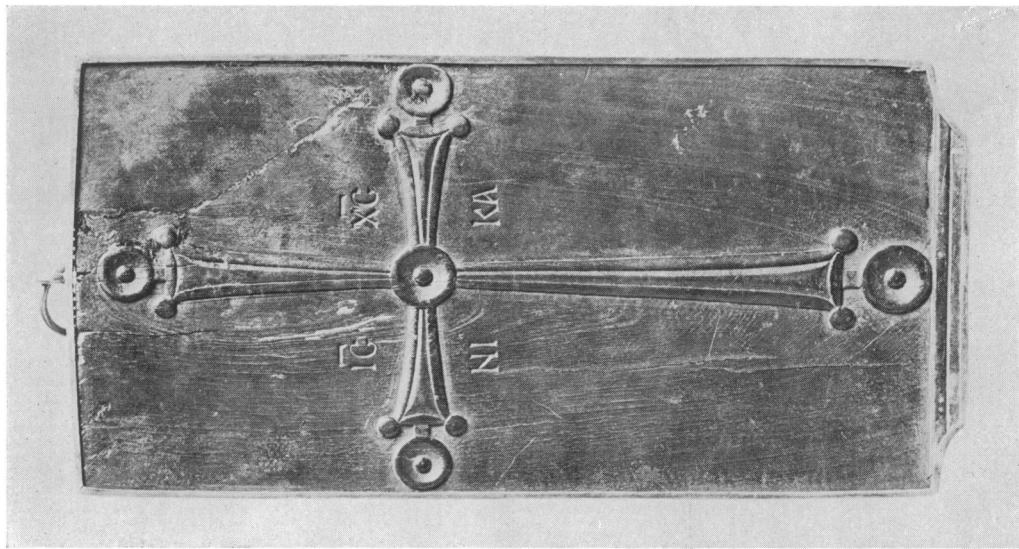


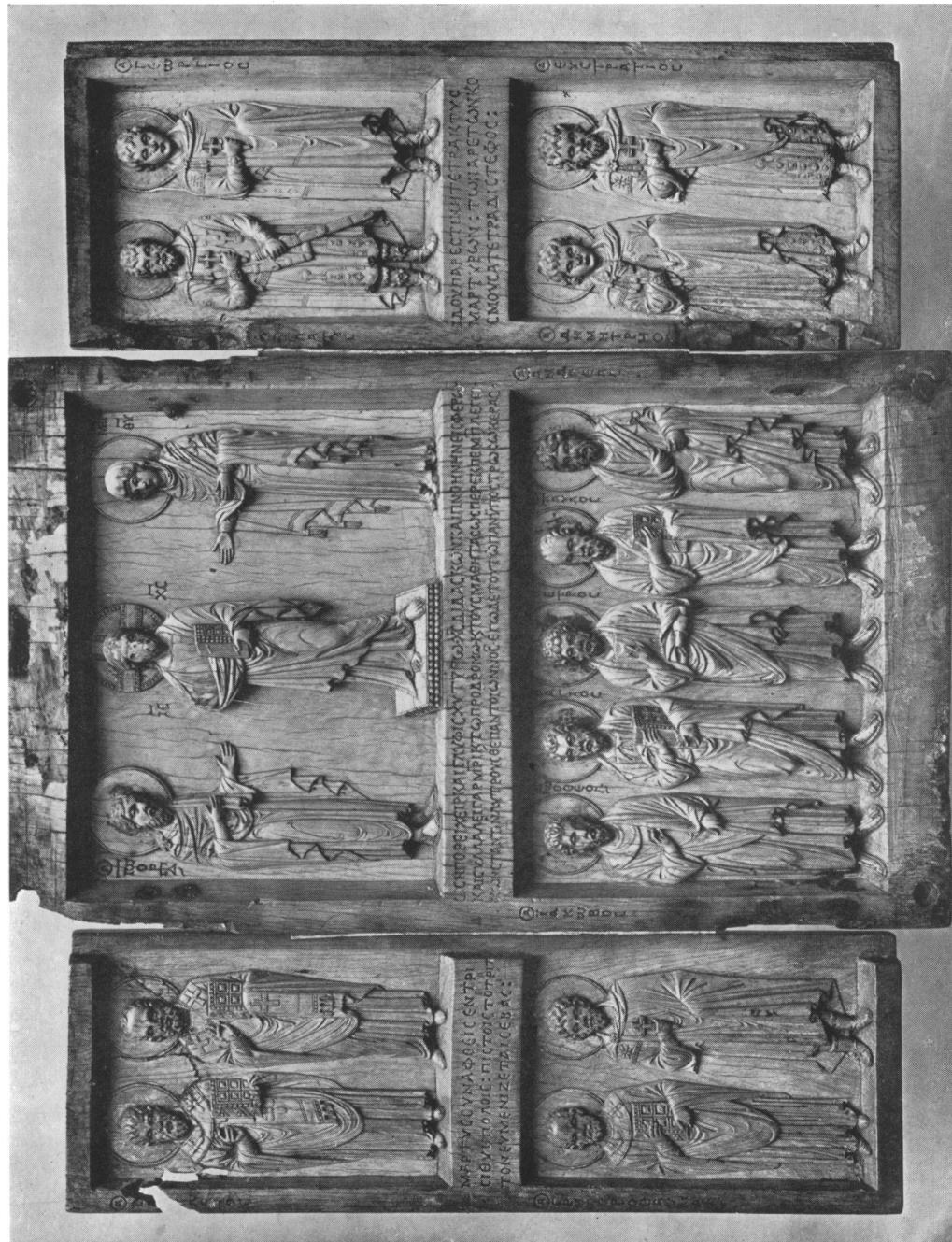
11. HANOVER, PROVINZIALMUSEUM, DIPTYCH LEAF



12. ROBERT VON HIRSCH COLL. BASEL, CHRIST

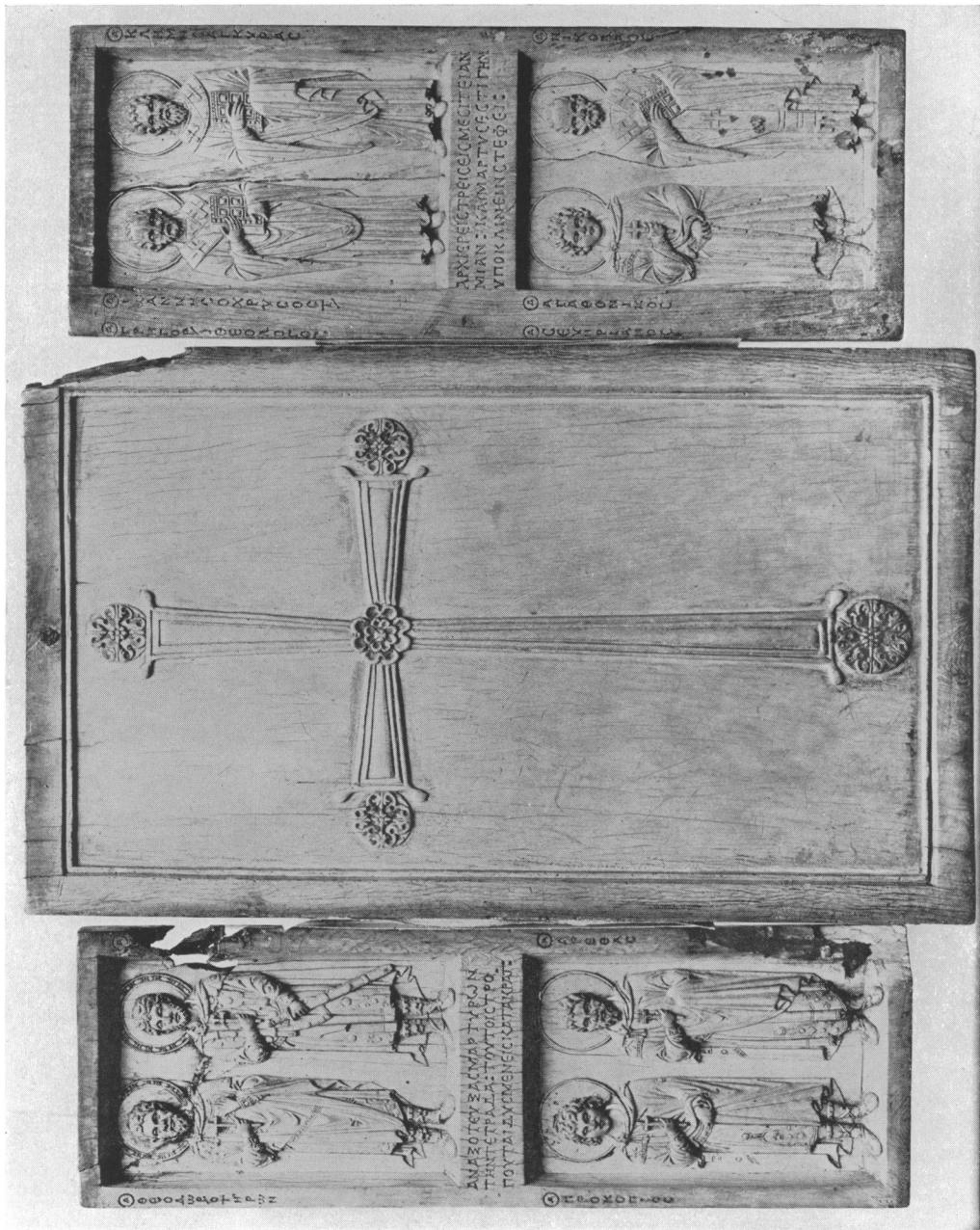
13. EX-STROGANOFF EX-GUALINO, COLL., CHRIST





14. PALAZZO VENEZIA, ROME, TRPTYCH

15. PALAZZO VENEZIA, ROME, TRIPTYCH





16. CORTONA, S. FRANCESCO, RELIQUARY OF THE TRUE CROSS



17. MUSÉE DE CLUNY, OTTO AND THEOPHANO PANEL



18A. MOSCOW, HISTORICAL MUSEUM,
CORONATION PANEL



18B. BRITISH MUSEUM, GOLD COIN
OF CONSTANTINE VII



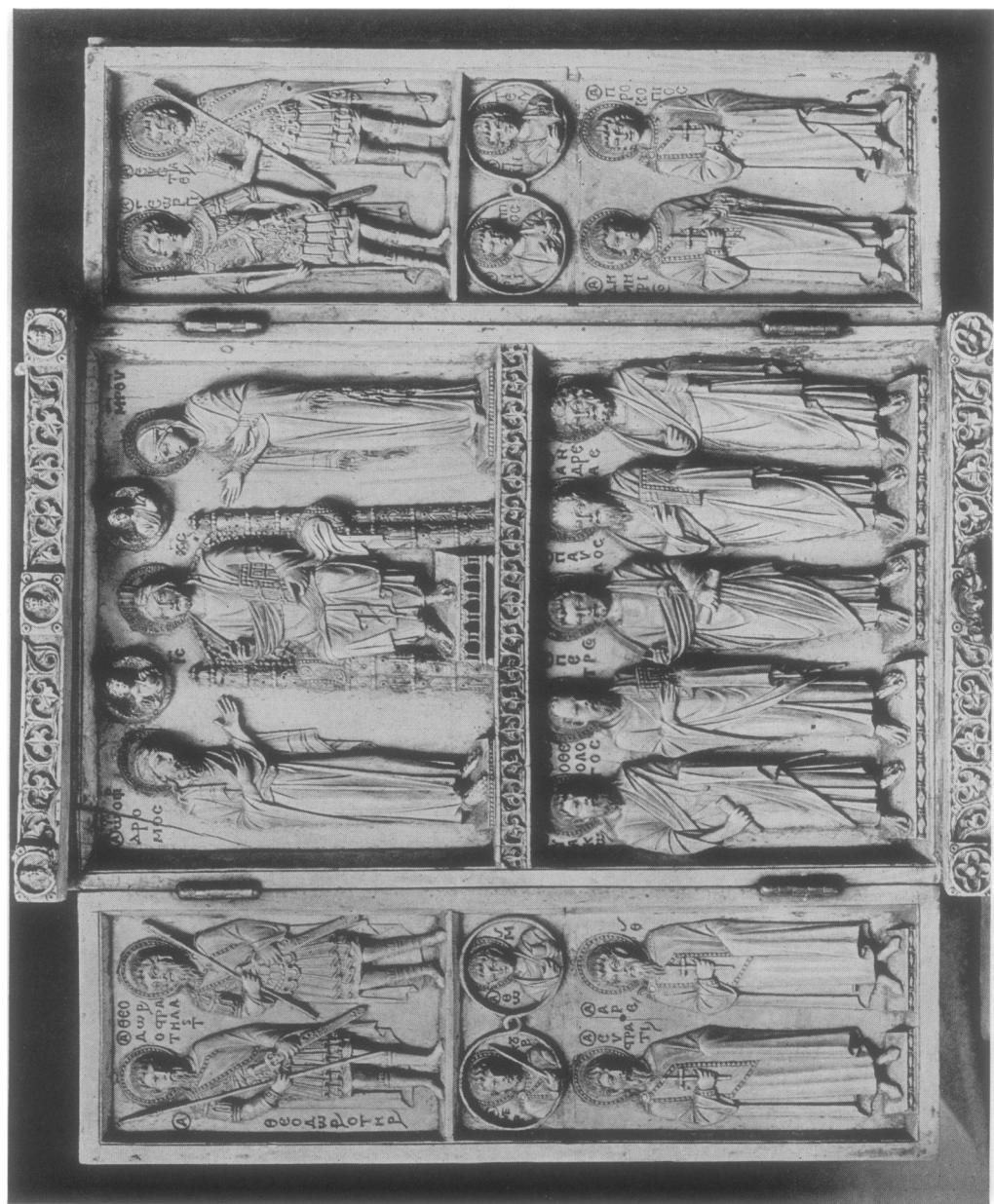
19A. CABINET DES MÉDAILLES,
CORONATION PANEL, DETAIL



19B. DETAILS OF DUMBARTON OAKS IVORY



20. VENICE, ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, PANEL WITH TWO SAINTS



21. LOUVRE, PARIS, HARBAVILLE TRPTYCH

22. RHEIMS, MUSEUM, ADAM AND EVE CASKET

